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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In the present report, the Secretary-General discusses developments in the field of elections and United Nations electoral assistance since his previous report (A/70/306). During the reporting period, the United Nations assisted, at their request or on the basis of a Security Council mandate, about one third of its Member States.

In the report, the contributions made by the multiple United Nations entities involved in electoral assistance are noted. The continued progress in ensuring coherence and coordination within the United Nations system is described and efforts to strengthen cooperation and strategic partnership between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations and other international electoral assistance providers are highlighted.

While there is no single formula for a successful process, the factors which, in the experience of the United Nations, can help to create an environment conducive to credible elections are discussed in the report. They include, inter alia, mitigating zero-sum politics; pursuing dialogue and consensus in establishing the legal electoral framework; focusing on inclusion and non-discrimination; and encouraging broad participation. As is emphasized in the report, the overriding responsibility for a successful election lies with political leaders, from both government and opposition parties. That encourages political actors to remain engaged in an electoral process once they have joined it and to refrain from alleging widespread fraud without evidence.

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Although there has been a continuous increase in terms of women's representation in parliaments worldwide, more needs to be done. Supporting the efforts of Member States in promoting the participation of women in political and electoral processes therefore remains one of the highest priorities of the Organization. The Secretary-General expresses deep concern at the violence committed against women in elections, and calls upon Member States to increase efforts to understand and prevent this form of violence.

Other aspects of inclusion in elections are touched on in the report, highlighting further specific groups that deserve special attention as voters, candidates and election workers, in particular persons with disabilities and youth. In addition, the challenges faced by Member States in allowing citizens abroad to exercise their political rights are addressed. While the participation of citizens abroad may be a factor in strengthening the credibility of an electoral process, such issues are best decided in context by the Member State concerned.

In some instances there have been tensions around efforts to remove or change term limits, but there is no international norm governing term limits as such. Nevertheless, term limits can be important safeguards against "winner-take-all" politics and the manner in which related amendments are sought can be critical factors affecting public confidence.

While demand for United Nations assistance remains strong, resource limitations have on occasion restricted the ability to meet that demand. In the report, concrete ways to address these serious funding challenges are called for. In that regard it is not always possible or appropriate to transfer electoral responsibilities from a United Nations peace mission to other United Nations entities.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 70/168, by which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of that resolution. In the report, United Nations activities in the field of electoral assistance since the previous report on the subject (A/70/306) are described.

2. In 1991, the General Assembly adopted a framework for the provision of United Nations electoral assistance, which continues to govern this field of work. United Nations electoral assistance is provided only at the specific request of the Member State concerned, or based on a mandate from the Security Council or the General Assembly. Before assistance is agreed and provided, the United Nations assesses the needs and capacities of the Member State to ensure that the support is tailored to the specific situation. The Assembly has reiterated on many occasions that assistance must be carried out in an objective, impartial, neutral and independent manner and with due respect for national sovereignty. It has also reaffirmed that there is no single model of democracy and that the responsibility for organizing elections lies with Member States.

3. During the reporting period, the Organization continued to respond to a significant demand for electoral assistance, in particular in the form of technical assistance and the strengthening of the capacity of national electoral authorities, even though the nature of the requests has also varied significantly. The report reflects on developments during the reporting period with respect to elections and electoral assistance. During the reporting period, the United Nations assisted, at their request or on the basis of a Security Council mandate, about one third of its Member States in conducting elections, through a wide variety of electoral assistance activities (see annex I).

II. United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

A. Mandates

4. Since its forty-fourth session, the General Assembly has regularly considered the question of enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections, including the issue of United Nations electoral assistance. Most recently, in its resolution 70/168, the Assembly recommended that the United Nations continue to provide technical advice and other assistance to requesting States and electoral institutions, in order to help to strengthen their democratic processes, bearing in mind that the United Nations may provide additional assistance in the form of mediation and good offices upon the request of Member States.

5. The institutional arrangements for United Nations electoral assistance and the number of entities involved in elections have grown and evolved over the years since 1991, the year in which the Secretary-General designated the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs as the focal point for electoral assistance matters, with the endorsement of the General Assembly. In a field of diverse United Nations actors, the General Assembly has repeatedly highlighted the importance of system-wide coherence and consistency, and has reaffirmed the leadership role of the focal point in that respect. Accordingly, the focal point is responsible for setting electoral assistance policies, for deciding on the parameters for United Nations electoral assistance in a particular requesting country and for maintaining the single

electoral roster of experts who can be rapidly deployed when required for any United Nations assistance activity.

6. The focal point is supported by the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs. Following requests from Member States and in consultation with relevant United Nations entities, the Division is responsible for conducting electoral needs assessments. It recommends to the focal point the parameters for all United Nations electoral assistance and advises on the design of electoral mission components or assistance projects. The Division also develops and maintains the United Nations single electoral roster of experts and is entrusted with maintaining the institutional memory of the Organization, in collaboration with other agencies. On behalf of the focal point, the Division provides political and technical guidance to all United Nations entities involved in electoral assistance, including on electoral policies and good practices. When required, the Division provides support to the Secretary-General and his envoys, and to United Nations political and peacekeeping missions in the prevention and mediation of electoral crises. The Electoral Assistance Division also maintains electoral partnerships with other regional and intergovernmental organizations involved in elections.

7. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the major implementing body of the Organization for support to developing electoral institutions, to building partnerships, legal frameworks and processes and for support to elections in non-mission settings. In resolution 70/168, the General Assembly requested UNDP to continue its democratic governance assistance programmes in cooperation with other relevant organizations, in particular those that promote the strengthening of democratic institutions and linkages between civil society and Governments.

8. In peacekeeping or post-conflict environments, electoral assistance is generally provided through components of field missions under the aegis of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the Department of Political Affairs. Military and police components of peacekeeping missions support national law enforcement agencies in providing security for electoral processes. UNDP usually contributes to the implementation of electoral assistance mandates undertaken by such field missions, including voluntary contributions by Member States. In countries with peacekeeping, peacebuilding or special political missions, electoral assistance is delivered in a fully integrated manner, under the mission lead, irrespective of whether the mission is structurally integrated.

9. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides training and advice on human rights monitoring in the context of elections, supports and organizes campaigns for peaceful elections and engages in general advocacy for electoral laws and institutions that are compliant with human rights. It also monitors and reports on human rights violations during elections, particularly on violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and to peaceful assembly and association, which can be at risk when elections approach. By its resolution 33/22, the Human Rights Council also requested the High Commissioner to produce, for the thirty-ninth session of the Council, a set of draft guidelines for Member States on the effective implementation of the right to political participation in public affairs, which includes the right to vote and to be elected.

10. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) works for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls, the empowerment of women and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security. Within that mandate and through its

normative support functions and operational activities, UN-Women provides guidance and technical support to all Member States, at their request, on gender equality, the empowerment and rights of women and gender mainstreaming. It promotes gender equality and women's participation in electoral processes and provides training and advice in those areas. UN-Women is also mandated to lead, coordinate and promote the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

11. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) promotes and supports freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of information. Free, independent media, online and offline, are essential to democracy and UNESCO therefore aims to support the development of fair, safe and professional media coverage, including by providing training to strengthen the capacity of the media to report in a fair and balanced manner on electoral activities.

12. Other entities of the United Nations system involved in electoral activities include the Department of Field Support, which is primarily responsible for providing administrative and logistical support to United Nations peacekeeping operations, special political missions and other field presences; the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which supports, in partnership with other United Nations entities, the implementation of electoral activities in post-conflict/peacekeeping environments or in non-mission settings; the United Nations Volunteers programme, which works with multiple partners to integrate qualified and highly motivated personnel into electoral projects and electoral components of peace operations, while promoting the value and global recognition of volunteerism; the Peacebuilding Fund, which can, exceptionally, support elections at critical junctures for peacebuilding; and the United Nations Democracy Fund, which supports projects that strengthen the voice of civil society, promote human rights and encourage the participation of all groups in democratic processes. In 2016, the International Organization for Migration, which is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and supports the implementation of out-of-country voting programmes for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, joined the United Nations system.

B. Electoral assistance activities

13. During the reporting period, the United Nations continued to provide assistance to Member States in conducting their electoral processes in a professional, accurate, impartial and transparent manner throughout all stages of their administration, and in implementing the democratic principles of universal and equal suffrage, as well as other international obligations of Member States. The Organization assisted Member States to build public confidence in the electoral administration and in the process itself, highlighting elections as part of broader, inclusive political processes. Where appropriate and as requested, the United Nations has also assisted Member States in creating a conducive environment for holding peaceful and credible elections through good offices, support to political dialogue, facilitation and mediation, often in collaboration with regional and subregional entities or other actors. Short descriptions of recent electoral assistance activities in selected Member States are set out in annex II. Lists of all the States that received electoral assistance during the period under review are contained in annex I.

C. Cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system

14. In its resolution 70/168, the General Assembly reiterated the need for ongoing comprehensive coordination under the auspices of the focal point. During the reporting period, progress was made in strengthening this coordination framework. Further system-wide electoral assistance policies were issued by the focal point, following consultations with United Nations entities, including policies on the conduct of United Nations personnel in and around electoral sites and on supporting the prevention of election-related violence. United Nations entities continued to meet in the Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism for Electoral Assistance, chaired by the Electoral Assistance Division, in order to exchange information, coordinate electoral activities and discuss the development of electoral policy.

15. The United Nations single electoral roster now includes 715 persons who have been assessed and pre-cleared as electoral experts at various levels and in different fields of electoral work. The Secretariat and participating entities continue to use the roster to meet their staffing requirements with specific profiles in field operations. In 2017, a campaign was launched to increase the number of candidates for senior-level positions, with particular emphasis on female candidates and those fluent in French.

D. Cooperation with other organizations

16. Progress was made in enhancing existing electoral partnerships with other organizations and in initiating new ones. For example, the Electoral Assistance Division continued to maintain a senior electoral expert position in the United Nations Office to the African Union to support the United Nations and the African Union in electoral matters, including in electoral crisis management. Together with UNDP, the Electoral Assistance Division also collaborated with the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in training electoral staff and in the management of electoral databases and institutional memory. In 2017, the United Nations, in partnership with the League of Arab States, organized a number of electoral practitioner events, also attended by representatives of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and other organizations. As a further example of collaboration, the United Nations and the secretariat of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) continued their newly established partnership in electoral matters, including through a staff exchange programme and a round-table discussion on women's participation in electoral processes. The United Nations also assisted with the establishment of an electoral database and institutional memory for the CARICOM secretariat.

17. UNDP continued to implement a large number of its support activities through a formal partnership with the European Union, one of its most significant partners, including in country-specific projects. The formal framework for this collaboration was reviewed and renewed in 2016. UNDP further supported the development of the first organization of Arab electoral management bodies, launched in June 2015, to provide a platform for regional collaboration. Between 2015 and 2017, OHCHR collaborated with the Carter Center to organize a series of workshops aimed at greater cooperation between the human rights and international election observation communities.

18. The United Nations maintained its support to platforms for electoral capacity-building, institutional memory and knowledge-sharing at the global level. They include the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network and the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) project. These are prominent

knowledge and training tools for electoral officials and practitioners around the world. The United Nations and other partners in these initiatives have actively contributed to updating them on a regular basis. Furthermore, since January 2017, UNDP, supported by the Electoral Assistance Division and other partners, serves as the ACE coordinator.

19. In October 2015, the Secretariat hosted the observance of the tenth anniversary of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, first commemorated at the United Nations in 2005. The Declaration has been endorsed by 52 organizations from various parts of the world, indicating its global recognition as a norm-shaping document for the professional observation of electoral processes. In a parallel development, the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, launched at the United Nations in 2012, has been endorsed by 293 organizations and continues to enjoy growing acceptance as a normative document among non-partisan citizen election monitoring organizations.

III. Gender equality and elections

20. The global average percentage of women in the lower or single houses of parliament has almost doubled since 1997, increasing from 12.4 per cent to 23.4 per cent in 2017. That is encouraging, but still far short of the gender balance highlighted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The figures are even lower for positions in other branches of government. For example, as of January 2017, only 7.27 per cent of all heads of State and 4.75 per cent of all heads of government were women. Women represented 18.3 per cent of all ministers, only a small increase from the 14.2 per cent they represented in 2005. Clearly, more needs to be done globally to improve the situation. Supporting the efforts of Member States in promoting women's participation in political and electoral processes therefore remains one of the highest priorities of the Organization.

21. United Nations entities, including UN-Women, UNDP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, OHCHR and the Department of Political Affairs, continued to provide technical assistance and advice to Member States on gender equality in elections. In Libya, an electoral gender-mapping exercise was undertaken by the United Nations in close coordination with relevant local authorities to identify existing barriers to women's participation and provide recommendations on potential strategies to overcome those barriers. In Nepal, UNDP and the Election Commission designed a programme to encourage the participation of women as candidates in the electoral process, with a particular focus on Dalit women. In Afghanistan, the Electoral Assistance Division advised the Special Electoral Reform Commission on changes to the electoral system, including ways to increase women's participation through the use of quotas and other temporary special measures. There were also continued systematic efforts to ensure that all United Nations electoral assistance policies and activities are gender-sensitive and include key components on promoting women's political participation. For example, every needs assessment conducted during the reporting period, included a gender analysis and related recommendations.

22. UN-Women and UNDP produced a guide for electoral management bodies on promoting gender equality and women's participation. UN-Women supported efforts to monitor a range of issues related to women's participation in political processes, including the establishment of domestic monitoring mechanisms to track and address incidents of violence, and the conduct of country-level assessments to

determine the scope of violence against women and identify prevention and response measures.

IV. United Nations resources for electoral assistance

23. The costs for the core staff of the Electoral Assistance Division are covered by the regular budget of the Organization. Extrabudgetary funds have continued to play a vital role in enabling the Division to carry out its various substantive activities. As noted in a recent report of the Secretary-General on the financing of peacekeeping operations (A/70/749), the Department of Political Affairs is currently working with other partners to monitor the provision of services by the Division to peacekeeping operations to ensure that activities directly related to peacekeeping in the area of electoral assistance are funded commensurately.

24. The trust funds administered by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, along with the UNDP funding window for governance and peacebuilding, both of which are funded through extrabudgetary resources, continued to play a key role in enabling the Organization to implement rapid response and catalytic projects and programmes, including those aimed at preventing conflict and supporting the participation of women and underrepresented groups in political processes. The Electoral Assistance Division used extrabudgetary funds to support the campaigns for the single electoral roster, as well as to rapidly establish activities and deploy experts to a number of countries upon their request. Extrabudgetary funds administered by UN-Women were used to support programming to promote women's political and electoral participation.

25. The funds for UNDP electoral assistance projects are generally provided through voluntary contributions from Member States and often managed through multi-partner basket funds, which include national counterparts in the management structure so as to ensure greater national ownership. In integrated peacekeeping and special political missions with an electoral component, the mission budget covers some of the electoral work (including that of the relevant mission staff), while the balance, which is often quite substantial, is funded through UNDP multi-donor funding mechanisms. Even without a change in the electoral assistance mandate of a mission, its resource requirements for electoral support activities are likely to vary over time. Typically, requirements will increase not only shortly before an election event, but at any time prior to a major phase in an electoral process. The cyclical, and sometimes unpredictable, nature of electoral processes calls for a flexible and longer-term perspective when considering staffing and other requirements. During the reporting period, UNDP faced significant challenges in raising funds for both its global project for electoral cycle support and for country-specific assistance projects. In some cases, including in peacekeeping contexts, United Nations electoral assistance could not be provided as requested, owing to a lack of funding.

V. Observations

26. As emphasized by the Secretary-General in a number of his reports and statements, the prevention of conflict is the priority of the Organization. A similar perspective is appropriate in considering United Nations electoral assistance. Elections, when well conducted, can be a process for conciliation, for giving voice to citizens and for peaceful transitions; but they may also deepen divisions, lead to exclusion or trigger violence. The challenge lies in identifying when and how an electoral process can help overcome conflict.

27. The foundation for United Nations engagement with Member States on elections consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other relevant conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Those human rights foundations of political participation and of the right to vote and to be elected are supplemented at the regional level by numerous instruments of a legal nature and by the political commitments of Member States. They are also supplemented by resolutions of the General Assembly, which on numerous occasions has reaffirmed that there is no single model of democracy and that democracy does not belong to any country or region.

28. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks not only of processes but of outcomes: "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government". Elections are the mechanism by which this will is to be expressed and in which the right of citizens to political participation is exercised. The process is important but not an end in itself. A genuine election is ultimately one in which the outcome reflects the freely expressed choice of the people. Citizens must have confidence that this outcome indeed reflects their will in order for it to be accepted. That confidence is determined by factors that go beyond the technical quality of the electoral process itself, or compliance with international obligations, or the effective performance of the electoral management body: it is also shaped by the broader political and economic context.

29. In the experience of the United Nations, the factors set out below can help to create a context that is conducive to credible elections, even if there is no single formula for all situations. Member States and the international entities supporting them are encouraged to consider these factors, as appropriate to their national circumstances, when implementing the right of their citizens to political participation.

Mitigating zero-sum politics well before an election

30. For elections to enjoy broad trust, they should not lead to a situation in which the winner gains all or most of the benefits. A stronger basis for acceptance is a political system which adheres to the rule of law and human rights and in which even defeated candidates have an incentive to participate and to continue to participate. That may involve longer-term reforms of the political and economic system to reduce extremely high-stakes and exclusionary politics; strengthening the system of checks and balances in government; introducing mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights for all; guaranteeing a genuine role for the opposition, including dialogue processes outside the parliament; looking at ways in which national resources are distributed; and tackling corruption and other systemic grievances.

Pursuing dialogue and consensus in setting the "rules of the game"

31. The legal framework for an election, including the electoral system and the mechanism to resolve electoral disputes, should ideally be developed through an inclusive, transparent and participatory process. The rules adopted should reflect a broad political consensus, in order to strengthen the credibility of the outcome those rules will produce.

Embarking on electoral reform: developing solutions that address the problem at hand and fit the context

32. Successful and sustainable reform processes, including the introduction of technological innovations, start with identifying the electoral problems that are to be

addressed rather than, for example, first discussing solutions that may have worked elsewhere. Once there is broad agreement about the shortcomings or difficulties to be overcome, the dialogue can proceed to consider the feasibility of options, preferably again through a broadly consultative process. Such options should take into account the political, legal, social and cultural circumstances of a country, as well as its financial sustainability.

Focusing on inclusion and non-discrimination and mitigating the politics of exclusion

33. Inclusiveness, and the idea that individuals and groups should be given a voice in decisions affecting them, is essential to arriving at an outcome that reflects the will of the people and enjoys broad legitimacy. Conversely, political grievances that rear their heads around election time often revolve around exclusion and marginalization. Some groups that face structural inequalities and are typically underrepresented or marginalized in the electoral process will need special consideration to enable their effective participation. Those groups can include women, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities, people in rural areas and areas that are difficult to access, migrants and refugees, and other populations that are vulnerable because of poverty or illiteracy, or other reasons.

Placing a premium on responsible political leadership

34. The overriding responsibility for a successful election lies with political leaders from both government and opposition parties. Leaders should publicly commit themselves and their supporters to engage in proper, peaceful behaviour; to challenge results through legal and peaceful means only; to accept final outcomes, as officially declared; and to be gracious in defeat and magnanimous in victory, including by ensuring important political space for the opposition. That responsibility also includes refraining from issuing threats of violence or judicial or other harassment of political opponents and from making sweeping comments about possible irregularities without sufficient evidence, or from declaring instances of anomalies to be proof of a "stolen", fraudulent election.

Encouraging the broad participation of all political actors rather than disengagement

35. Something valuable is lost when political actors decide to withdraw from an electoral process. Among other things, it means fewer options for citizens to participate and to have their voice heard, narrowing them down to protest and abstention. While there may be situations of such extreme manipulation or violence that meaningful engagement is compromised, in principle contestants should be encouraged to remain engaged in an electoral process they have joined and discouraged from refusing, ex ante, to accept legitimate outcomes for political gain.

Strengthening both the performance of the electoral authorities and how they are perceived by the electoral stakeholders

36. Election management bodies should not only be able to do their work effectively and to do it free of political influence; they should be perceived as doing so. The independence of an electoral management body and its impact on the credibility of an election has a strong subjective aspect. The independence of such a body is based not only on the regulations that protect it, but also lies in the eyes of the beholder: the voters and the parties. Electoral management bodies should strive to be open, transparent and maximally consultative and informative with and to key contestants, civil society and the general public.

Taking politically and financially sustainable decisions about technology

37. While new technologies can be a tool at the service of electoral processes, the relationship of technology to the success of an election is not always straightforward. United Nations experience suggests that technology by itself does not necessarily create trust or prevent fraud. New technology may be best introduced as a solution to problems that might hinder the credibility of a process or the acceptance of results, not as an end in itself. The process of considering innovations and of procuring equipment, if so decided, must also be credible. Broad outreach and consultations with all stakeholders and comprehensive and consultative feasibility studies should be carried out before introducing technological solutions, including on their financial sustainability. Furthermore, a gradual introduction through pilot projects is important, in order to thoroughly test innovations.

38. Member States are therefore called upon to undertake more systematic efforts to promote and enable women's political participation, which is critical to stable and democratic societies. Regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations are also encouraged to continue to play a supporting role in this regard. As noted in previous reports, the effective political participation of women does not end with increasing their numbers on an elected or appointed body, it requires the full empowerment of women as active participants and leaders in voting and decision-making across public services.

39. While more women than ever before participate as voters, candidates, polling agents, election officials and observers, the violence perpetrated against women in elections is of deep concern. It deprives women of exercising their right to participation and to live a life free from violence; hampers opportunities for their full and equal representation in decision-making; and thereby weakens democratic processes and institutions. Member States, with United Nations support if needed, can and should do more to understand these forms of violence and develop tools to prevent them.

40. In a world with vibrant and vocal young people, who in some regions constitute more than 60 per cent of the population, it is regrettable that younger generations are not always given an active voice in policy decisions that will shape their future. All Member States are urged to consider ways to increase the participation of youth in decision-making and in electoral processes as candidates, voters, electoral officials, party agents and observers. Political leaders and parties are also urged to promote generational changes and consider internal party regulations that can help advance young leaders.

41. Around 1 billion people, or 15 per cent of the world's population, experience some form of disability, which presents a number of obstacles to their full participation in political processes. Member States are encouraged to recognize the particular needs of their citizens with disabilities and take steps towards removing the obstacles that prevent them from fully and equally participating in the electoral process, in line with the commitments under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for those Member States that have ratified it.

42. Member States face tremendous challenges in dealing with migration flows of displaced and fleeing people, as well as migrants motivated by the desire to improve their economic circumstances. The exercise of their political rights has also become a prominent question. Except in the specific case of persons governed by the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the international normative framework does not guarantee voting rights for those who have left or fled their country. Nevertheless,

making provisions for citizens abroad could be a factor in strengthening the credibility of a process. Whether or not to make arrangements for the exercise of political rights abroad is best decided by the Member State concerned, after thorough national consultations, and taking into consideration factors such as the size of the population in question, the costs involved, agreements with host countries and security and operational challenges.

43. There were a number of instances during the reporting period in which tensions around an election were in part caused by efforts to change or remove existing term limits. Although there is no international norm governing term limits as such, where they have been adopted, mostly in presidential or semi-presidential political systems, term limits can be important mechanisms to safeguard against "winner-take-all" politics. Under certain circumstances, the removal of or a change in term limits can undermine the confidence necessary for the political system to function well. The potential for amendments to a legal framework to undermine confidence is greater when they are introduced without following the prescribed process, if they are undertaken shortly before an election, or if the process is not based on a broad national consensus. All leaders are encouraged to consider these factors and their impact before pursuing a change in term limits.

44. The United Nations system stands ready to support Member States, at their request, in facing these and other challenges in conducting their elections. The strength of the system lies in its political impartiality and in the global expertise accumulated over several decades. It also lies in the fact that United Nations assistance is designed to be multipronged, drawing on the expertise of a range of diverse United Nations entities, while maintaining a cohesive, coordinated framework with a global focal point function and a strong focus on integration and delivering as one. These institutional arrangements have proved to be efficient. Furthermore, electoral assistance is designed to complement other United Nations activities, in particular those in support of peaceful transitions, democratic governance, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality.

45. These factors help to explain why the demand for United Nations assistance continues to be very strong. There is, however, no guarantee that assistance can always be successfully delivered. Among other factors, resource considerations place de facto limitations on the extent to which demand can be met. During the reporting period, the United Nations faced instances in which, after the focal point had duly assessed the needs of a Member State and approved a package of technical assistance, international donor funding was not sufficient to complete or even launch an assistance project. While this may be consistent with patterns of donor support in other areas, this emerging challenge must be addressed. Where the United Nations has been requested or mandated by the Security Council or the General Assembly to provide electoral assistance, sufficient funding should be channelled through the United Nations to honour that request or implement that mandate.

46. Given the long-term nature of electoral processes, it is critical to ensure that United Nations missions mandated to provide electoral assistance be adequately resourced with staff and non-staff resources to enable mandate delivery. Those can be complemented during various phases of the electoral process, or around unanticipated electoral events and related political developments with increased capacity. At the same time, in considering future requests for assistance, the focal point has been requested to consider financial sustainability as a matter of greater priority, and to actively explore, in consultation with the Member State concerned, opportunities for lower-cost, sustainable alternatives in electoral processes without sacrificing quality or credibility.

47. Such funding challenges are a reminder that it is not always possible or appropriate to transfer all electoral responsibilities from a continuing United Nations peace mission to other United Nations entities: the latter may simply not be able to attract sufficient donor support to implement the electoral mandate. Aside from financial reasons, it would not be desirable to completely disconnect a United Nations electoral support role, where it exists, from the political mandate of a mission because of the fundamentally political nature of electoral processes.

48. When responding to difficult or challenging elections, effective United Nations assistance, particularly where it is combined with other international efforts to defuse tensions, requires unity and cohesion in the international community. A successful example of this cohesion was the case of Burkina Faso, where a timely engagement of institutions at the international, regional and subregional level was instrumental in encouraging progress and providing the diplomatic, technical and financial support required to restore stability and prepare for the 2015 legislative and presidential elections. In other situations, in contrast, the international community has struggled to find unity and cohesion, which has made preventive diplomacy more challenging to bring about. For an effective alignment of good offices and electoral assistance, opportunities are welcomed for the focal point to provide technical input to regional organizations, at their request, and to relevant United Nations bodies, when discussing election-related topics, to help provide a common understanding and facilitate decision-making.

Annex I

States that received United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

Afghanistan*
Albania
Algeria
Argentina
Armenia
Benin
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)
Burkina Faso
Burundi*
Central African Republic*
Chad
Chile
Comoros
Côte d'Ivoire*
Democratic Republic of the Congo*
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
France/New Caledonia
Ghana
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau*
Guyana
Haiti
Honduras
Iraq*
Jordan
Kenya
Kyrgyzstan
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia*
Libya*
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali*
Mexico
Mozambique
Myanmar
Nepal
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Peru
Republic of Moldova
Rwanda
Samoa
Sao Tome and Principe
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Solomon Islands
Somalia*
State of Palestine
Suriname
Timor-Leste
Togo
Tunisia
Uganda
United Republic of Tanzania
Vanuatu
Zambia

* Assistance provided under a Security Council mandate.

Annex II

Selected examples of United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

Armenia

At the request of the Government, the United Nations through UNDP assisted the Central Election Commission with the procurement and installation of new technologies ahead of the National Assembly elections in April 2017. In parallel to United Nations technical assistance, the Resident Coordinator engaged with the national stakeholders, supported by the Department of Political Affairs, to underscore the need for broad political consensus for the introduction of technological innovations. An agreement between the Government, the opposition and civil society paved the way for the reforms and for undertaking a feasibility study on electronic voting prior to its full roll-out. These were the first elections in Armenia to utilize new technology that allowed for the biometric identification of voters on election day.

Burundi

At the request of the Government of Burundi, and following the adoption of Security Council resolution 2137 (2014), the United Nations deployed, from 1 January to 31 December 2015, an electoral observation mission in Burundi, the United Nations Electoral Observer Mission in Burundi (MENUB). The mission was mandated to follow and report on the various stages of the presidential, parliamentary and local elections scheduled in 2015. MENUB observers followed standard regional and international electoral observation practices and assessed the process against the international obligations of Burundi and its national legal framework. The Secretary-General reported on the conduct of the electoral processes through reports to the Security Council (S/2015/510 and S/2015/985). UNDP provided electoral assistance through a support project working primarily with the Independent National Electoral Commission. The OHCHR office in Burundi organized a series of workshops on human rights and elections, and supported the establishment of a national network of observers, who were deployed across the country to monitor and report on allegations of human rights violations.

Central African Republic

Between December 2015 and March 2016, the Central African Republic successfully held a constitutional referendum and combined legislative and presidential elections, despite daunting challenges. Both the referendum and the elections were characterized by a relatively high turnout and generally peaceful campaigning by candidates and their supporters. With the exception of security incidents that occurred during the referendum, the successive election days were free of violence. International observers and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) reported significant technical and logistical improvements from one poll to the next. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2217 (2015), the United Nations provided political, technical, operational, logistical and security support in a challenging security and political environment. MINUSCA and members of the United Nations country team undertook, with national and international partners, a series of activities to promote a political and security environment conducive to the holding

of the elections. Important efforts were undertaken by the Department of Political Affairs to provide technical and political support to the United Nations team on the ground and the national authorities, including the deployment of two missions of the Electoral Assistance Division in 2015. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees helped to enable refugees in neighbouring States to participate in the electoral process. The United Nations assisted the Transitional Authority in mobilizing and coordinating international support and funding for the electoral process, which was budgeted at $36.6 million. From the outset, UNDP set up an electoral basket fund which was instrumental in managing funding gaps with potential impact on the electoral process.

Comoros

In 2016, the United Nations was requested by the Government of Comoros to accompany tightly contested presidential and governorate elections. Following the second round of the elections, on 30 April 2016, the constitutional court ordered a rerun in 13 polling stations where polling had been disrupted. Given the narrow margins of the provisional results, the partial rerun could have had an impact on the final outcome of the elections and potentially led to violence if there had been a loss of confidence in the process. Against that background, the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP deployed two senior electoral experts to provide technical guidance to the national authorities; their engagement was instrumental in defusing tensions. In addition, the Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union visited Comoros and led efforts to facilitate the deployment of a delegation of the African Union to observe the rerun. The joint United Nations and African Union presence, among other confidence-building measures, contributed to the acceptance of the election results.

Côte d'Ivoire

Following years of political turmoil around conflicting views on the conditions for enabling a peaceful and inclusive transfer of power in Côte d'Ivoire, the Security Council adopted resolution 1528 (2004), establishing the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and later provided the head of mission with a certification mandate for the oversight of the long-postponed elections (eventually held in 2010). In 2015, Côte d'Ivoire successfully held a second presidential election. The presidential election was followed by the 2016 constitutional referendum and legislative elections, conducted peacefully within the constitutionally established time frames. The extensive electoral support provided to the Independent Electoral Commission of Côte d'Ivoire since 2005 by UNDP and UNOCI has been gradually scaled down with the Commission fully assuming its role and independently organizing the 2016 elections without external technical support. Any residual needs have been addressed through the good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General supported by a reduced electoral capacity at senior level, retained within the structures of the mission. The subsequent closure and withdrawal of UNOCI by the end of June 2017 attest to the good progress of the political transition in Côte d'Ivoire. While some technical and political challenges remain, the country continues to address them in a peaceful manner.

France/New Caledonia

At the request of the Government of France and in the context of the 1998 Nouméa Accord, which established a framework leading to a consultation on access to full sovereignty to be held in New Caledonia in 2018, the United Nations deployed two missions of experts to accompany the 2016 and 2017 update of the provincial voter list and the constitution of the special voters' list for the consultation. Both initiatives were led by the Department of Political Affairs and were administratively supported by UNOPS. The United Nations experts worked as non-voting advisory members within the 10 Special Administrative Commissions conducting the voter registration process across the territory. In addition a senior expert, heading the teams, also participated in the work of the Committee of Experts accompanying the process and advising on the interpretation of voters' eligibility criteria. The presence of the United Nations experts during the voter registration process was envisioned as a confidence-building measure to enhance the credibility and transparency of the process. The reports of the experts were shared with the Government of France and the President of the Congress of New Caledonia. Their recommendations were addressed by the administering Power through a set of measures designed to correct the shortcomings that had been identified.

Haiti

In 2016 and 2017, Haiti successfully completed the interrupted presidential, parliamentary and local elections of 2015. The preliminary results of the inconclusive first round of the 2015 presidential elections had been challenged in the streets by a number of candidates, leading to the disruption of the process ahead of the second round. Following multiple unsuccessful attempts to reschedule the second round, a political agreement between the outgoing President and key political stakeholders was reached, leading to the formation of a provisional Government and the holding of elections on 20 November 2016. The Provisional Electoral Commission, supported by a United Nations integrated electoral team led by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), and including UNDP, UN-Women and UNOPS, delivered the process without major technical problems, despite the devastating impact of a major hurricane in parts of the country. Notably, the Government assumed greater responsibility for the conduct of the elections by covering the costs of the process. OHCHR monitored the response of the police and justice authorities to election-related incidents in connection with the voting process. The results of the 2016 and 2017 elections were largely accepted and contributed to the restoration of the constitutional order, concluding one year of provisional governance. That paved the way for a re-evaluation of the United Nations presence in Haiti. It is expected that while MINUSTAH will be followed by the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti in October 2017, the new and reduced mission will retain a political and coordination role in electoral assistance beyond 2017, focusing on consolidating the gains achieved and supporting a possible electoral reform process.

Jordan

Jordan held legislative elections on 20 September 2016. The elections were an important step in the country's political reform process, in which it has sought to strengthen the efficiency of the parliament, build a multiparty system and increase political participation by citizens. As part of the process, elections were held under new legislation that introduced an open list proportional representation electoral

system and a redrawing of electoral boundaries. Following proactive decisions by the Independent Election Commission on voter registration, there was a significant increase in the number of registered voters: compared to the 2.2 million voters registered for the previous elections, over 4.1 million were included for the 2016 elections. National and international observers commented positively on the role of the Commission in effectively managing the elections, especially on its outreach efforts to engage with voters and young voters in particular. Voter turnout was 36 per cent. Notably, the level of participation by young voters in the 17-25 age bracket was above average, at 38 per cent. The elections also saw an increase in the number of women elected to the parliament, from 12 per cent in 2013 to 15.4 per cent in 2016. At the request of the Jordanian authorities, UNDP provided the Independent Election Commission with comprehensive technical advice and assistance, with a specific focus on areas relating to voter registration, electoral operations and public outreach.